

VZCZCXRO7119  
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #4064/01 3651455  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 301455Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1059  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004064

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/31/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KCRS](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: PRT SALAH AD DIN: APPREHENSION OVER COMING SOI  
TRANSITION

REF: A. BAGHDAD 4057  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 3922

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor John Fox for Reasons 1.4 (b)  
and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Salah ad Din reporting cable.  
[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY: Provincial leaders are concerned that the  
upcoming transition of responsibility for Sons of Iraq (SOI)  
contracts from Coalition Forces (CF) to the Government of  
Iraq (GOI) could undermine security improvements in Salah ad  
Din (SaD). While SOI transition in SaD is not scheduled to  
take place until April 2009, local leaders are already  
carefully tracking progress in other regions. Many SOI  
sheikhs in SaD are reluctant to see the CF or GOI implement  
any transition arrangement that removes operational control  
of the SOI program from the Sheikhs' direct supervision. SOI  
members themselves, however, appear primarily concerned with  
having a steady salary. Rank and file members of the SOI in  
SaD are largely unskilled workers with few alternative  
sources of income. The PRT and CF in SaD have been seeking  
opportunities to shift SOI members into long-term civilian  
employment, but the lack of comprehensive jobs or training  
programs will limit the reach of these efforts. END SUMMARY.

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SaD LEADERS TRACKING SOI TRANSITION ELSEWHERE  
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[1](#)3. (SBU) In SaD, SOI registration is scheduled to begin in  
March, and transition to GOI responsibility will begin in  
April. (NOTE: As of December 28, SaD province had 124 SOI  
contracts incorporating 8,521 individuals. END NOTE).  
Leaders at all levels of the provincial government, however,  
have already begun to express concern that a poorly managed  
transition to GOI control would lead to a rapid decrease in  
security.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Provincial and local officials are tracking the  
progress of the SOI transition in Baghdad. They have so far  
commented favorably on CF and GOI management of the process,  
which they view as predictive of how events will unfold in  
SaD. On December 27, PRT officers spoke with one Sheikh who  
controls a security contract for 65 men along Route Tampa  
outside Tikrit. He said that the SOI transition was going  
smoothly in Baghdad, which would bode well for the SOI  
transition in his area.

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SOI ADMIRER IN SAD  
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[1](#)5. (C) Provincial leaders and many citizens in SaD credit the  
SOI with the rapid improvements in security over the last  
year and a half. Bayji Oil Refinery Director General Ali  
Obeidi commented in a September meeting with PRT officers  
that "there should be some sort of monument to them (the  
SOI)." Deputy Governor Abdullah Jebara has often credited  
the SOI with "defeating al-Qaida" during conversations with

the PRT. The achievements of the SOI are all the more politically significant for SaD residents, since they are the local, Iraqi face of the counterinsurgency.

16. (U) Many SOI sheikhs and members derive great satisfaction from their service, which has enabled them to provide income to their families and linked them with a force that is praised for improving security. On market walks and community engagements, PRT officers are often approached by young men introducing themselves as SOI members with evident pride. Likewise, many SOI sheikhs have used the income and status they derive from SOI contracts to expand their role in politics and business (refs).

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BUT ALSO FEARED  
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17. (C) At the same time, many local observers speak fearfully of the SOIs' brutality and general lack of discipline. PRT Qof the SOIs' brutality and general lack of discipline. PRT officers have received unconfirmed reports from local contacts of the involvement of off-duty SOI members in crimes ranging from extorting fuel trucks to sexual assault. During engagements with local leaders, PRT officers have often noted the youthfulness of the SOI members and their poor discipline (e.g., their tendency to accidentally discharge their weapons). On a few occasions, PRT locally hired staff has related fearful, late-night encounters with SOI members at checkpoints around the province. On one occasion, a PRT contact from the banking sector insisted that CF warn SOI sheikhs not to display their guns in his office or "make a lot of noise about their relationship with the Americans"

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before he would agree to collaborate on a project involving several powerful local SOI sheikhs.

18. (C) PRT contacts frequently accuse SOI members of maintaining contact with both the CF and insurgent groups, and thus should not be fully trusted. As a local business contact commented to the PRT in November, "al-Qaida used to pay them (the SOI) to place IEDs, now you (CF) are paying them to fight al-Qaida." Some in SaD fear that, without CF control, some SOI will revert to insurgents. Asked if the men under his control would do this, one Bayji-based Sheikh denied that this would be a problem with his men, but that SOI members from "other groups" could fall under al-Qaida influence again if they were left off the payroll.

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SOI SHEIKHS LOOKING TO MAINTAIN STATUS  
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19. (C) Many SOI sheikhs that the PRT has spoken to are reluctant to see any arrangement that would remove operational control of the SOI, or payment of SOI salaries, from them. Asked what jobs his men would seek after the SOI contracts expire, one Bayji area Sheikh told us that his men would only accept jobs that allowed them to "carry our own guns and protect our own villages;" i.e. preserve the status quo. Nonetheless, most of the SOI "soldiers" that we have met said they would eagerly accept any well-paying job of equal status.

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SOI SALARIES SUPPORTING POOREST FAMILIES  
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110. (C) SOI salaries are a major source of income for some of the most economically vulnerable workers in SaD and their extended families. A Human Terrain Team study by CF in SaD found that over half the SOI in SaD (63.6 percent) have no marketable skills or training. Few of them that we have interviewed have completed secondary school. (NOTE: SOI members in SaD are paid \$250 U.S./month, which is considered

a good salary for unskilled workers. END NOTE). Furthermore, the 8,581 SOI members on contract in SaD as of December 28 support a median family size of ten people. This will magnify the effect of any loss of income.

¶11. (SBU) During conversations with the PRT, very few SOI members said they had any good prospects for new employment. Many of them have told us they wish to join the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF). This may reflect SOI members' favorable perception of ISF jobs as well as a lack of confidence in their ability to obtain any other desirable employment. In Samarra, approximately 600 former SOI members are expected to complete police training and be sworn into the force by the end of December.

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TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT OPTIONS LIMITED  
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¶12. (SBU) In coordination with CF in SaD, the PRT is working to develop employment opportunities for former SOI. The PRT has persuaded one contractor linked with our hoop house agricultural initiative (building plastic greenhouses) to hire 24 SOI members for a short-term construction project. (NOTE: We expect the number of former SOI employed in this project to quadruple as the hoop house project moves forward. END NOTE). Iraqi Business and Industrial Zone (IBIZ) Skills Enhancement training programs have helped more than 92 former SOI members to get jobs at COB Speicher.

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COMMENT  
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¶13. (SBU) Finding stable employment for the 8,500-strong force of experienced fighters will be one of the primary challenges in SaD for the PRT, CF, and GOI in the coming year. Current funding ceilings for programs such as Quick Qyear. Current funding ceilings for programs such as Quick Response Funds and Iraqi Rapid Assistance Projects are insufficient to address this challenge in a comprehensive manner. Tapping into appropriate funding sources--whether from the GOI or the U.S.--will enable us to increase the number of former SOI members that are prepared for civilian employment. END COMMENT.  
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